



**Ethical reputation as an organisational choice indicator: effects of job seekers' gender,
field of study and family income level.**

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Abstract

Recruiting and retaining top tier talent has increasingly become one of the few ways organisations can differentiate themselves from their competitors. In pursuit of the best talent for competitive advantage, an understanding of what job seekers want has become paramount in recruitment strategies. Given South Africa's heterogeneous population make-up, the labour market consists of various groups of job seekers, each with unique characteristics that inform their organisational choices. To this end, the researcher sought to compare organisational choice decisions of different demographic groups of job seekers. Specifically, group comparisons in the consideration of ethical reputation as an organisational choice indicator, were made between job seekers of different genders, academic backgrounds and family income levels. Students registered at a metropolitan university in South Africa participated in a self-report measurement instrument titled Organisational Choice Indicator ($N = 330$). Exploratory Factor Analysis revealed a four-dimensional construct for organisational choices in South Africa. Independent t-tests showed that job seekers from higher family income levels consider ethical reputations of organisations when choosing employers, more than their counterparts from lower family income levels. However, the test also revealed no significant differences between male and female job seekers, in the consideration of this indicator. Analysis of variance with planned contrasts indicated that in their job search endeavors, individuals with Humanities backgrounds consider how ethically reputable an organisation is, more than those with Engineering and Commerce backgrounds. Implications of these findings are presented, as well as suggestions for future research.

Key words: Organisational choice, ethics, organisational ethical reputation, job-seekers' demographics.

Table of Contents

Introduction-----	6
Research Questions-----	8
Structure of the Dissertation -----	9
Literature Review -----	10
Literature Search-----	10
Organisational Reputation and Ethics -----	10
Organisational Choice -----	12
Organisational Choice: The South African Case -----	13
Indicators of Organisational Choice-----	14
Organisational Ethical Reputation as an Indicator of Organisational Choice -----	15
Organisational Ethical Reputation and Gender Differences -----	16
Organisational Ethical Reputation and Job-seekers' Fields of Study -----	17
Organisational Ethical Reputation and Job-seekers' Family Income Levels -----	20
Method -----	24
Research Design -----	24
Respondents -----	24
Instrument -----	26
Sampling Procedure -----	28
Ethical Considerations -----	29
Data Analyses -----	29
Results -----	33
Descriptive Statistics of Organisational Choice Indicators -----	33
Descriptive Statistics of Ranked Indicators -----	36
Structure of the Measurement Scale: OCI -----	39
Internal Consistency of Measurement Scales -----	44
Differences in Means -----	46
One-way Independent Analysis of Variance -----	47
Summary of Results -----	48
Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusion -----	50
The Psychometric Properties of the OCI -----	50
Differences in Means between Male and Female Job Seekers' Consideration of Ethical Reputation when Choosing an Employer. -----	52
Mean Differences in Consideration of Ethical Reputation by Job Seekers from Higher and Lower Family Income Levels -----	53

Mean Differences in Organisational Ethical Reputation Consideration Between Groups of Job Seekers from the Engineering, Commerce and Humanities Academic Fields -----	55
Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research-----	56
Theoretical Implications-----	58
Practical Implications -----	58
Conclusion-----	60
References -----	61
Appendix A-----	75

Introduction

The contemporary world of vast technological advances has made it relatively easier for most aspects of an organisation's operations and products to be imitated, thereby making it difficult for an organisation to stand out from its competitors (Besanko, Dranove, Shanley, & Schaefer, 2009). As a result, employees are increasingly becoming the core of competitive advantage; whereby organisations realise the attraction and retention of quality human capital as a way to differentiate themselves (Vance & Vaiman, 2008). Business success is increasingly determined by an organisation's ability to attract, motivate and retain a talented workforce (Duarte, Silva, Simões & das Neves, 2017).

Consequently, truly talented employees may be viewed as a scarce resource that organisations fiercely compete over in the 'war for talent' (Duarte et al., 2017; Komm & Lawson, 2008; Michaels, Handfield-Jones & Axelrod, 2001). Organisations are thus faced with small pools of innovative and talented job seekers, especially in South Africa, where the labour market is characterized by alarmingly high skills shortages (Horwitz, 2013). This, linked to uncertainty about what exactly attracts this scarce talent to one organisation instead of another, – makes for particularly challenging talent acquisition processes (Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg, 2002).

To further complicate this problem are the varying characteristics, values and motivations held by different cohorts of job seekers (Terjesen, Vinnicombe & Freeman, 2007; Konrad et al., 2000). Demographic characteristics place job-seekers into different cohorts; with each cohort having unique values and preferences. Studies have for example, shown that generational differences play a significant role in informing job seekers' choice of an organisation for which to work (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000). To illustrate, a job-seeker's membership to either generation Y or X influenced which factors they perceived as important when choosing a workplace (Donaldson, 2011; Van de Merwe, 2013; Zemke et al., 2000). For this reason, an awareness of shared values and characteristics of different job-seeker cohorts is central in guiding an organisation to tailor its recruitment processes optimally - to appeal to its target cohort and thus, stand a better chance at attracting employees that could be the organisation's competitive edge.

Of the various factors that have been linked to organisational attractiveness to potential employees, reputation of an organisation has increasingly received attention as a vital factor to consider during talent attraction endeavours (Williamson, King, Lapak, & Sarma, 2010). Positive associations have been found between organisational reputation and a host of outcomes including competitive advantage (Clardy, 2005); customer loyalty (Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson, & Beatty, 2009); greater market evaluation (Agarwal, Stackhouse & Osiyevskyy, 2018); and the attraction and retention of quality talent (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010). These positive outcomes derive from the contribution of an organisational reputation to predict potential future behaviours of the organisation (Agarwal et al., 2018), reducing stakeholder uncertainty (Walker & Dyck 2014), and creating relational trust. Reputation also enhances the legitimacy of an organisation (Deephouse & Carter, 2005), or its 'licence to operate'.

Despite its recognized importance, organisational reputation (OR) is rife with competing definitions and implicit conceptualisations (Agarwal et al., 2018). This can largely be attributed to the use of the concept across various management research fields. For instance, organisational behaviourists such as Love and Kraatz (2009), define OR as a collective stakeholder evaluation of the organisation. On the other hand, marketing theorists view it as a 'customer-specific' evaluation of a company's attributes (Agarwal et al., 2018); while strategy researchers tend to see it as an intangible asset a company has in the market in comparison to other companies (Deephouse & Carter, 2005). For this reason, a number of reviews have been conducted in an attempt to reconcile the contradictions by combining these definitions (Agarwal et al., 2018; Barnett, Jermier & Lafferty, 2006; Deephouse & Carter 2005; Fischer & Reuber, 2007; Love & Kraatz, 2009). As a result, the widely accepted conceptualisation of organisational reputation is one that rigorously captures three distinct dimensions: "product and service efficacy, market prominence, and stakeholder trust" (Agarwal et al., 2018, p.15).

It stands to reason that stakeholders' (customers, investors and potential employees/job-seekers) perceptions of organisational reputation are closely linked to ethical reputation. After interviewing executive managers of 14 highly successful organisations in America and Europe, Davies and Miles (1998) discovered that the core values promoted by CEOs in managing the reputations of their companies were centred on ethics. They all emphasised ethical values such as reliability, integrity, caring, social responsibility and honesty, as instrumental in building a good organisational reputation (Davies & Miles, 1998). Additionally, in its assessment of corporate reputation, "Fortune's America's Most Admired Companies List" uses indicators of

ethics such as social responsibility, to assess organisational reputation (Chun, 2006). Moreover, various studies have shown that an organisation that exhibits ethical qualities, encourages potential job-seekers to have positive perceptions about its reputation as an attractive workplace and inspires commitment to the organisation (Balmer, 2013; Davies, Chun, da Silva, & Roper, 2004; Palazzo & Basu, 2007; van de Ven, 2008).

In light of the above, ethical reputation appears to be fairly established as an important indicator of organisational choice. It could be enlightening to explore whether this is the case in a developing country like South Africa, where high unemployment rates and low socio-economic status of many jobseekers may not permit them the ‘luxury’ to consider ethical reputation when making organisational choices (Kingdon & Knight, 2004; Mahadea & Simson, 2010).

Additionally, while its centrality has been shown in attracting talent, the extent to which different groups of job-seekers consider ethical reputation when making a choice about which organisation to apply to work or work for, remains largely unexplored (Terjesen et al., 2007; Van de Merwe, 2013). Job-seekers of different gender categories, field of study and family income levels hold diverse sets of needs and values that could determine factors that attract them to workplaces – it is not unreasonable to expect them to attach varying levels of importance to ethical reputation as an organisational choice.

With that in mind, the aim of the current study is to investigate the extent to which different job-seeker cohorts value ethical reputation as an organisational choice indicator, and to explore possible reasons for the variance in value attached to this construct. Such analyses could potentially assist employers to understand how they could, depending on their target job seeker categories, best utilise the organisational ethics that they promote, to shape their recruitment strategies towards obtaining the best talent.

Research Questions

A considerable amount of research has been conducted on the importance of ethical reputation for talent attraction. In particular, the studies by Donaldson (2011) and Van de Merwe (2013) focused on perceived organisational ethics as a factor in job seekers’ organisational choices. Besides these two exploits, the applicability of international research findings to a developing country such as South Africa, remains largely unknown. Like many other developing countries, South Africa is plagued with high unemployment rates, high skills

shortages owing to low educational levels, low income, low living standards and high-income inequality (Anand, Kothari, & Kumar, 2016; Oluwajodu, Greyling, Blaauw, & Kleynhans, 2015). With this economic reality, it is questionable whether South African job seekers have the ‘luxury’ of considering ethical reputation during job seeking - as European and American based research results have indicated. This is further questionable when group differences within the South African workforce are brought into account – given the country’s highly heterogenous population, popularly known as the rainbow nation. This is explored in the current study, with the aim to answer the following primary and secondary research questions:

Primary Question:

To what extent do certain group differences of South African job seekers contribute to whether and the extent to which they consider organisational ethical reputation when choosing jobs?

Secondary Questions

1. Do male and female job seekers make different career choices in their consideration of organisations’ ethical reputations?
2. Are job seekers with engineering academic backgrounds more likely to consider ethical reputation than those from the commerce and humanities backgrounds when making organisational choices?
3. Is the level of job seekers’ family income associated with the extent to which they are likely to consider ethical reputation?

Structure of the Dissertation

This chapter served to provide context to the current study and described its rationale and research aims/questions. The following chapter will provide an in-depth review of extant literature and relevant theory, in order to derive plausible hypotheses and conceptual frameworks. The review will be followed by a method chapter that will outline the design and participants of the research, sampling, measures, ethical considerations and statistical analyses. The results chapter will then present the research findings, thereafter, followed by a discussion of those results in relation to current literature, along with theoretical and practical

contributions. The dissertation is concluded with an overview of the study's limitations and recommendations for future research, respectively.

Literature Review

A review of literature relevant to the research question is required to ensure contextualization and positioning of the current research. The review will commence with a discussion of organisational reputation and how it is closely linked to organisations' ethical conduct. This will be followed by an exploration of the concept of 'organisational choice' and how it may be viewed to unfold in the South African context. Thereafter, an exploration of gender, study fields and family income levels as factors that may determine how organisational ethical reputation is perceived as an organisational choice indicator, is provided. Plausible hypotheses are also presented in this chapter accordingly.

Literature Search

In the current study, an extensive literature review was conducted over a period of one year, with the use of online academic search databases such as Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, Google Scholar and LexisNexis. The online searches were often restricted to peer-reviewed journals, where possible. To identify published articles, various search items were used. Examples include: organisational choice, business ethics, gender, ethical awareness, ethical misconduct, ethical scandals, organisational attractiveness – among others. Boolean AND/OR operators as well as derivatives of these search terms were used to identify the most relevant and up-to-date sources. In addition, each article's reference list was inspected to identify more sources relevant to the subject matter.

Organisational Reputation and Ethics

The multifaceted nature of organisational reputation may cause definitional confusion. For instance, contradicting definitions of organisational reputation by marketing, strategy and organisational behaviour researchers have been observed in the management literature (Agarwal et al., 2018). From a marketing perspective, Agarwal, Osiyevskyy and Feldman, (2015) define organisational reputation as a customer-specific evaluation of an organisation's attributes that affect their loyalty to the organisation's products and services. On the other hand, organisational behaviour researchers take a multidimensional view of organisational reputation

by describing it in terms of three concepts: collective awareness and perception of an organization (*being known*), perceived predictability of a firm's outcomes and behaviors (*being known for something*) and perceptions about the overall organization as good and attractive (*generalized favourability*) (Barnett et al., 2006; Lange, Lee & Dai., 2011; Love & Kraatz, 2009). In this view, the extent to which an organisation is widely noticed by stakeholders in relation to its competitors, forms an important dimension to organisational reputation (Lange et al., 2011). Therefore, it appears that at the current stage in the study of organisational reputation, a consensual definition is yet to emerge.

Nonetheless, a systematic review of 43 research papers on organisational reputation, revealed that the majority (26%) of them referred to Fombrun's (1996) definition as extrapolated by Walker (2010). Other definitions of corporate reputation had never been repeated, thus suggesting that Fombrun's definition has traditionally been regarded as fundamental (Walker, 2010). Organisational reputation can therefore be defined as a "perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects that describes the firm's overall appeal to all of its key constituents, when compared with other leading rivals" (Fombrun, 1996; Walker 2010). It provides customers, job applicants and investors with a sense of security and trust, as an organisation's likely behaviour can be anticipated (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010).

Closely linked to organisational reputation is the concept of ethics (Reuber & Fischer, 2010, Alwi, Ali & Nguyen, 2017). As a component of reputation, ethics play a crucial role in shaping stakeholders' perceptions about an organisation. As previously mentioned, an organisation that embodies ethics in its operations and interactions with its customers, employees, investors; engenders trust from the stakeholders – this forms a significant part of its reputation. Zhu, Sun, and Leung (2014) found that when evaluating companies, individuals tend to consider available information on past ethics related organisational performance. That is, ethics related activities such as CSR initiatives appeared to dominantly shape stakeholders' personal sense of the reputation of the organisation (Zhu et al., 2014). Ethics is therefore an intrinsic component of organisational reputation, hence the concept of ethical reputation (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010).

In addition, the close link between the reputation of an organisation and its ethical disposition is seen when a perfectly well-reputed corporation might disintegrate as soon as it engages in any ethically questionable activity (Fombrun & Foss, 2004; Steyn, de Beer & Schreiner, 2004). For instance, when companies such as Tyco and Enron in the USA and,

Oakbay, Sahara, Leisurenet and Saambou locally, were faced with charges of unethical business practices such as fraudulent financial transactions, they lost market relevance from dissatisfied stakeholders, as evidenced by drops in their stock value and eventual overall demise (Fombrun & Foss, 2004; Steyn et al., 2004). The eventual failure of these once powerful companies was largely as a result of their tarnished reputations as good, ethical brands, thus indicating the centrality of ethics to a reputation of an organisation (Lloyd, 2011).

Ethical reputation reflects an organisation's commitment to ethical business practices; it's "actual, observed ethical behaviour"; along with stakeholders' perceptions of its ethical conduct (Baselga-Pascual, Trujillo-Ponce, Vahamaa, 2018; Mulki & Jaramillo, 2011). Ethical reputation has been found to enhance positive perceptions of corporate reputation as a good place to work (Lai, Chiu, Yang, & Pai, 2010, Duarte et al., 2017). This suggests that it could play a key role in job seekers decision-making processes about which organisations to work for. Indeed, there is some empirical evidence that job seekers are more attracted to organisations that are considered to be ethically reputable and socially responsible (e.g., Backhaus, Stone, & Heiner, 2002; Bauer & Aiman-Smith, 1996; Duarte et al., 2017; Randy & Davis, 2011; Lin, Tsai, Joe, & Chiu, 2012). In light of this, it would be anticipated that South African job seekers, as potential employees, might also consider organisational ethical reputation in their job-seeking endeavours.

Organisational Choice

To examine the construct of organisational choice, earlier studies have largely used Vroom's (1966) expectancy theory and decision theories to explain the process of choice-making (e.g. those of Greenhaus, Sugalski & Crispin, 1978; Herriot, Ecob & Hutchison, 1980; Hill, 1974; Lievens, Decaestecker, Coetsier & Geirnaert, 2001; and Soelberg, 1967). From his study, Vroom (1966) found a significant relationship between organisational choice and the perceived instrumentality of that organisation to fulfil certain goals individuals may aspire to, for example increased remuneration. According to expectancy theory, motivation to exert effort towards something is a function of the individual's perception that he/she will achieve an attractive outcome (Carless & Imber, 2007). Based on this theory, individuals seek and are attracted to workplaces that provide them with their desired outcomes. Before choosing an organisation for which to work, they logically assess the likelihood that their decision to join will result in the outcomes they expect from an organisation. They may thus approach job-

seeking with a well thought-through set of goals and expectations of a prospective employer (Carless & Imber, 2007).

In line with expectancy theory's notion of individuals carefully assessing organisations, are objective and subjective factors (Behling, Labovitz & Gainer, 1968). According to *objective factor theory*, individuals use objectively measurable criteria to weigh advantages and disadvantages of each organisation before choosing one (Maier & Youngs, 2009). Conversely, *subjective theories* give no regard to objectively measurable factors but instead focus on the degree to which an organisation's image fits with individuals' intrinsic personal and emotional needs (Behling et al., 1968). This theory suggests that the image an individual holds of an organisation is unlikely to be influenced by objectively measurable factors and that these factors merely confirm what the individual already perceives about that organisation.

Contrary to expectancy, subjective and objective theories, Soelberg (1967) proposed that choosing an organisation is a rather "unprogrammed" decision-making process. He suggested that individuals use very few outcomes to screen organisations, and only when they commence with the job-seeking process, do they focus on comparing prospective employers (Soelberg, 1967). Once job-seekers find a job that meets even the most minimal of their criteria on the most important factors to consider, they tend to confirm this choice (Lievens et al., 2001). As such, after having implicitly made an organisational choice decision, individuals use perceptual distortion to substantiate and reinforce this choice (Greenhaus et al., 1978).

Organisational Choice: The South African Case

The South African populace is characterised by an array of different identities. Differences in race, ethnicity, religion, education, language and economic status are but a few factors that make for a unique context for the application of employment research. As a legacy of apartheid, racial disparities in education levels greatly impact on the South African labour market (Fourie, 2011). Groups of South Africans who were disadvantaged under apartheid (e.g. having had limited access to education), are still lagging behind. Educational levels are low in the country, unemployment is high and income inequality is at its peak (Dias & Posel, 2007; Leibbrandt, Finn, & Woolard, 2012; Spaull, 2015).

Despite affirmative action measures to redress racial inequalities of apartheid, the high unemployment rates in the country continue to be racially differentiated. In the last quarter of 2018, Black South Africans contributed 40.7% to the unemployment rate of the country, followed by 29% of the Coloured, 14.9% of the Indian and lastly, 8.5% of White South Africans (StatsSA, 2018). This, coupled with a labour market characterised by shortages of high skills owing to low education levels, has talent attraction implications that are unique to the South African context. Given the scarcity of jobs, it is questionable whether South African job seekers consider organisational reputation, or, more specifically, organisational ethical reputation during job-seeking endeavours – especially certain groups of South African job seekers.

Indicators of Organisational Choice

Talent attraction research has identified various factors that prospective employees consider when searching for employment. Factors such as remuneration package, promotion prospects, nature of work and opportunities for growth and development, have formed much discourse (Tymon, Stumpf & Doh, 2010; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2008). Other factors that have been shown to be considered by job-seekers include geographical location and environmental conditions (Montgomery & Ramus, 2007). These factors are particularly important in South Africa given the socio-economic realities in which many job-seekers find themselves. For instance, the inadequacy of public transport in the country may lead to job-seekers without personal transport considering jobs within easy traveling distance (Donaldson, 2011).

Additionally, a study by Highhouse and Lievens (2003) identified job security, task demands and travel opportunities as significant predictors of an organisation's attractiveness to potential employees. Fortune's '100 best companies to work for list' is one of the most consulted references when individuals make decisions about which organisations to work for (Hinkin & Tracey, 2010). To formulate that list, Fortune Magazine emphasises factors such as innovation, diversity and social responsiveness to compare organisations (Hinkin & Tracey, 2010). This suggests that these factors may be considered by many job seekers when making organisational choice decisions.

Potential employees might also consider organisational reputation elements such as the "brand" of a company (Edwards, 2010). This refers to a desired impression created by an

organisation with the intention to communicate a particular meaning to stakeholders, about how the organisation functions, as well as ‘what’ it stands for (Edwards, 2010). Extant literature on ‘employers of choice’ shows the importance of being an attractive employer brand in the attraction of potential employees (e.g. Edwards, 2010; Fulmer, Gerhart & Scott, 2003; Rampl, 2014; Wilden, Gudergan & Lings, 2010). A reputation of an organisation forms a crucial aspect of employer brand associations and has been found to affect the attractiveness of an organisation’s brand (Turban & Cable, 2003; Rampl, 2014). Organisational culture elements such as respect and the nature of relationships are also often considered by prospective employees when making organisational choices (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2008).

In light of the discussion above, it is evident that factors influencing organisational choice differ between individuals. As a result, there appears to be no definitive job-seeker expectations that organisations can readily focus on for improved talent attraction strategies. Nonetheless, the reputation of organisations is increasingly gaining research attention as a prominent indicator of organisational choice. An organisation that devotes enough resources into building a well-reputed image may therefore be better able to attract talent. Organisational reputation and, ethical reputation in particular, as organisational choice indicators are discussed in more detail below.

Organisational Ethical Reputation as an Indicator of Organisational Choice

According to Rossouw and Van Vuuren (2017), organisational reputation refers to the “extent to which stakeholders would be comfortable to form relationships, business or otherwise, with the organisations” (p.109). It essentially describes “a subjective evaluation of a firm’s overall quality relative to its peers” (Love & Kraatz, 2009, p.314). Rindova, Williamson, Petkova and Sever (2005) view organisational reputation as a function of how stakeholders perceive the ability of the organisation to create value in comparison to its competitors.

As could be deduced from the previously discussed cases of the failed once-successful organisations, good organisational reputation takes a long time to build. However, it may take just one unfortunate event to demolish it. For this reason, many organisations go to great lengths to build and sustain good reputations (Davies, Chun, Da Silva & Roper, 2003). Organisations allocate a great deal of monetary and time resources towards the management of their reputation (Walker, 2010). Vast amounts of money are annually allocated to building and sustaining positive and respectable reputations (Davies et al., 2003).

Ethics has been identified as a significant component of organisational reputation (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010). Indeed, there exists empirical evidence from various studies that, candidates consider ethics-based characteristics of organisational reputation such as corporate social responsibility, when assessing potential workplaces (e.g., Backhaus et al., 2002; Bauer & Aiman-Smith, 1996; Randy & Davis, 2011; Duarte et al., 2017; Lin, Tsai, Joe & Chiu, 2012; Van De Merwe, 2013). Organisational ethics involves an ethical-principles-based interaction between an organisation and its stakeholders. According to Rossouw and Van Vuuren, (2010), an ethical foundation is a necessary condition for a good organisational reputation and therefore, a prerequisite for business success. As a substantial component of this organisational reputation, organisational ethical reputation makes for compelling research into whether and the extent to which job-seekers consider it when choosing employers.

Organisational Ethical Reputation and Gender Differences

Gender is one of the most widely studied factors influencing individuals' ethical behaviour and the level of importance they place on ethics (e.g. Chen, Tuliao, Cullen, & Chang, 2016; Craft 2013; Dalton & Ortegren 2011; Robin & Babin 1997). A potential reason gender has received such attention from business ethics research may be the exponential growth in female university graduates, in comparison to their male counterparts (Chen et al., 2016, Ibrahim, Angelidis, & Tomic, 2009). Dinan (2016) found that not only do women form the majority of university graduates, but that tertiary institutions increasingly have to lower admission standards to accommodate male applicants who would otherwise not qualify for admission. This suggests that a larger proportion of job-seekers may be female. This is further substantiated by the observed differences in length of time taken by students to graduate and join the labour market. Some researchers argue that due to their superior work ethic and focus, female students outperform their male counterparts and thus often complete their degrees more timeously (Dayioğlu & Türüt-Aşık, 2007; Sheard, 2009).

On the other hand, some researchers have found empirically insignificant gender differences in university performance and the subsequent degree completion time (McMillan-Capehart & Adeyemi-Bello, 2008; Sulaiman & Mohezar, 2006). Despite the contradictory empirical findings, extant literature does point to gender differences in academic performance and degree completion time – thus implying that indeed, the job market may have considerably more female job seekers.

The gender-ethics association is often explored using gender identity theory (Chen et al., 2016). Proponents of this theory postulate that the phenomenon of gender identity is multidimensional – including but not limited to dimensions such as psychological qualities, biological sex, and gender-role attitudes (Chen et al., 2016). According to the psychological qualities dimension, women are seen as more interpersonally oriented, expressive, and more caring than men (Kidder & Parks 2001; McCabe, Ingram, Dato-On, 2006). Gender socialisation explains ethics-related differences between men and women by emphasizing the role of social factors in causing distinct moral development between the two gender categories (Chen et al., 2016; Roxas & Stoneback 2004).

The theory contends that for men the importance of ethical behaviour is largely related to rights and obligations (Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988; Smith & Oakley, 1997). Conversely, for women, moral issues are more associated with understanding and compassion for others (Callahan, 1990). Given these theoretical frameworks, it is possible that female job seekers may be more likely to consider ethical reputation when choosing an organisation for which to work. This leads to the first hypothesis for this study:

H₀: There is no significant gender difference in the mean scores for consideration of ethical reputation

H_{1a}: Female job seekers consider ethical reputations of organisations to a larger extent than their male counterparts when choosing workplaces.

Organisational Ethical Reputation and Job-seekers' Fields of Study

While many South Africans are faced with the persistent challenge of high unemployment, this reality affects certain individuals more than others. Job seekers' academic discipline seems to be an important factor determining how individuals experience the labour market, given that considerable differences in these experiences have been associated with different fields of study (Reimer, Kucel & Noelke, 2008). For example, differences in economic rewards, occupational status and unemployment risks have been observed between graduates from 'soft fields' such as humanities and those from 'hard fields' such as engineering (Arcidiacono, 2004; Biglan, 1973; Marini & Fan, 1997; Reimer et al., 2008). Specifically, Arcidiacono (2004) and Marini and Fan (1997) have shown that those that hold humanities

and social sciences degrees tend to fare considerably worse (higher unemployment risks, lower occupational status and lower income earnings) in the labour market, relative to their peers from engineering, computer science and other ‘hard skills’ academic disciplines. This implies that graduates from the latter fields of study are valued more in the labour market. Circumstantially, it is possible that job seekers from these two streams may also consider different factors when choosing employers – especially given their varying degrees of ‘luxury of choice’. Below, theoretical underpinnings explaining why different fields of study are differently valued in the labour market are provided.

From a human capital perspective, it is argued that there are variations in both the learning environments and competencies acquired across different fields of study (Paul & Murdoch, 2007; Reimer et al., 2008; van de Werfhorst & Kraaykamp, 2001). It is asserted that some fields develop more productive competencies than others and that, the extent to which they impart general versus occupation-specific skills to learners, also differs (Reimer et al., 2008). Given most employers’ interest in reducing training costs, they often tend to have a preference for hiring candidates holding occupation-specific degrees over those with general education degrees (Reimer et al., 2008). This preference mainly rests on the assumption that candidates from occupation-specific fields require less or less rigorous training than their counterparts from other fields. Consequently, if certain fields such as engineering have a more occupation-specific curricular orientation that directly prepares individuals for specified jobs, it is likely that job seekers from less specific fields would have greater difficulties securing employment (Glebbeeck et al., 1989; Van de Velden & Wolbers, 2007).

From a signalling perspective (Spence, 1978), degree completion in some fields is regarded as more substantially dependent on prior ability than in other fields. Employers’ awareness of varying distributions of ability across different fields affects the ‘signal’ value they attach to job seekers’ degrees (Reimer et al., 2008). Disciplines that carry a higher signal value are those in which success is strongly associated with prior ability. It has been contended that ‘hard fields’ like physics, engineering and computer science more heavily rely on pre-existing academic prowess such as mathematics aptitudes, than other fields such as humanities (Arcidiacono, 2004; Reimer et al., 2008). For example, Arcidiacono (2004) demonstrated that students with majors from ‘hard fields’ such as the natural sciences, scored significantly higher on Scholastic Aptitude Tests than their peers in the social sciences. These ability differences translate into varied signal values of study fields in the labour market (Arcidiacono, 2004).

In addition, employment opportunities for soft fields graduates are further decreased when employers fear it might cost a lot more to train them – given their perceived lower ability, in comparison to their peers (Arcidiacono, 2004; Reimer et al., 2008). Moreover, the lower abilities required for success in soft fields can be seen from the more frequent graduations in these fields (e.g. humanities), in relation to other fields such as engineering and computer science (Gebel & Pfeiffer, 2007). The faster rates of degree completion by ‘soft fields’ graduates may often translate into their saturating the labour market, thus causing an oversupply that may further increase their risks of unemployment (Arcidiacono, 2004; Gebel and Pfeiffer, 2007; Reimer et al., 2008).

This is particularly the case in South Africa, where the labour market is characterised by an oversupply of soft skills and an undersupply of hard, occupation-specific skills – a situation Pauw and colleagues refer to as “the production of the wrong types of graduates” (Pauw, Oosthuizen & Van De Westhuizen, 2008, .p. 48). Through the department of Home Affairs, the South African government has responded by importing such hard skills from immigrant labour (Department of Home Affairs, 2019). There are as many as 215 types of occupations listed as scarce, critical skills in the South African labour market and out of this total – the majority require an Engineering and Built Environment (EBE) academic background (45%), while only 5.5% of them require commerce graduates and only 0.5% humanities faculty graduates (Department of Home Affairs, 2019). This demonstrates that the South African labour market does indeed have an oversupply of graduates from soft fields and a scarcity of those with qualifications from hard fields of study (Oluwajodu, Greyling, Blaauw & Kleynhans, 2015).

Given these differences in the demand for their respective skills, job seekers with qualifications from these two distinct fields are therefore impacted differently. Specifically, their experiences of unemployment and earnings is determined by whether they hold degrees from ‘soft’ or ‘hard’ fields. In this paper, it is proposed that given their higher unemployment risk and ‘predisposition’ to earning less, job seekers holding degrees from the humanities and social sciences may simply be more desperate to get ‘any’ job, and may not have the opportunity/luxury to consider an organisation’s ethical reputation, in relation to their ‘hard fields’ degree-holding counterparts. The following hypotheses were formulated to investigate this:

***H₀*:** There is no significant mean difference in the perceived importance of ethical reputation between jobs seekers with Engineering, Commerce and Humanities academic backgrounds.

***H_{2a}*:** Job seekers from Engineering fields are more likely to consider organisational ethical reputation than those from the Humanities and Commerce fields.

Organisational Ethical Reputation and Job-seekers' Family Income Levels

Job seekers from different family income levels also have different labour market experiences, differences which may determine their job search behaviours. Specifically, those from lower family income levels face higher risks of unemployment, as uncovered in a study by Gutierrez (2013). She explored the link between family income and joblessness and, found evidence of a gap in unemployment rates between the lowest and highest-income families in America (Gutierrez, 2013). She further found that unemployment rates for job seekers from households earning less than \$20,000 were as high as 21%, while those from families earning more than \$150,000 a year was a mere 3.2% - a rate previously defined as full employment (Gutierrez, 2013).

These disparities in unemployment rates may determine what organisational choice indicators job seekers from these two family-income cohorts consider the most important, given their different dispositions and unique desperation levels for employment-related income. Essentially, it is reasonable to expect that individuals from lower income families would have greater need for money, such as that from unemployment – in relation to those from higher income families. Therefore, in their greater need to obtain employment, job seekers from lower income backgrounds may not have the opportunity to consider indicators such as ethical reputation, just as long as they 'get a job'. This is all the more likely in a country of high inequality and unemployment like South Africa.

Indeed, it was revealed in a local study by Van de Merwe (2013) that, due to the country's socio-demographic circumstances, for example high unemployment and low standards of living; some job seekers would be willing to work for any organisation that offers

them employment, with minimal consideration of that organisation's ethical reputation (Van de Merwe, 2013). Specifically, she discovered that despite their preference to work for an ethically reputable employer, South African job seekers often 'have' to accept any job they are offered, as it may be difficult to find work because of the high unemployment rates (Van de Merwe, 2013). Those from lower income families are more vulnerable to making organisational choices out of desperation for income, irrespective of other employer characteristics such as ethical reputation.

This is further explained by how differences in economic freedom between job seekers from lower and higher family income levels may determine their pay preferences and thus, their organisational choices (Van den Berg & Uhlendorff, 2018). Owing to their limited economic options, prospective employees from low income backgrounds attach a considerably higher importance on pay grade in relation to any other factor, when choosing employers (Van den Berg & Uhlendorff, 2018). Their low economic freedom increases their need for competitive remuneration and they are therefore less concerned about any organisational choice indicators that are not directly linked to economic benefits (Van den Berg & Uhlendorff, 2018). This is in line with earlier empirical findings by Cable and Judge (1994). They found that a huge majority of the low-income job searching population regard remuneration as most important job attribute, given their greater need for financial resources (Cable & Judge, 1994).

In addition, lower income job seekers could potentially compromise non-remuneration related factors such as ethical reputation because the lower income brackets of their families may indicate a greater need for these individuals to depend more on their jobs for financial security, as they would less likely receive sufficient financial support from their low-income families. Therefore, while non-remuneration related indicators such as ethical reputation may be considered, the value placed on them would be less for job seekers from low-income family backgrounds. The theory of survival ethics could help explain this dynamic.

Survival ethics theory holds two main principles, the first being that to be is better than to be good (Finlay, 1990; Verharen, 2011). According to this principle, it is not possible for individuals to engage in ethical matters or behaviours unless they exist - only after ensuring survival can one "afford to deliberate about abstract ethical and moral issues" (Verharen, 2011, p.1). Basically, in the absence of life itself, it is impossible for any other value to exist - survival is thus a pre-condition for all other values (Verharen, Tharakan, Bugarin, Fortunak, Kadoda, Middendorf, 2014). Consequently, the survival of job seekers from lower income families first

needs to be ensured before they can consider ethical reputations of organisations when searching for jobs. Essentially, their primary concern is to first survive by securing employment – given their greater need for employment-related financial security. The deliberation about how ethically reputable a prospective employer is, will be subsequent to them first having obtained employment for their own survival.

The second value of survival ethics theory involves the mechanism through which survival is guaranteed: through the pursuit of conditions for flourishing (Hamburg, 1956; Verharen, 2011; Verharen et al., 2014). Proponents of this theory postulate that the optimum guarantee for survival is the attainment of a flourishing life – a life of rationality, which consists of pleasure, community bonding and meditation, among other values (Verharen et al., 2014). In essence, human survival is dependent on several basic, unassailable necessities such as shelter, clean water, nutritious food, healthcare and education (Finlay, 1990; Verharen, 2011). While many first world countries are able to offer citizens free access to these basics, in many third world countries like South Africa, most of them are obtained by those that can personally afford to. For example, European countries such as Sweden and Germany offer free education for all citizens well into tertiary education, while the South African government still barely meets the United Nations' decree of providing free, compulsory primary education for all children (Arendse, 2012; Griffiths, 2017; Welsh, 2004).

Given these realities, South Africans who cannot readily afford the basic elements of human survival are often more desperate for employment opportunities. Again, indicating that as something central to their survival. Job seekers from low income families will likely prioritize employment over any ethics-related issues regarding a potential employer. In light of this discussion, the following hypotheses were formulated respectively:

H₀: There is no difference in the consideration of ethical reputation between job seekers from lower and higher family income levels.

H₃: Job seekers from higher family income levels consider ethical reputation to a larger extent than those from lower family income levels.

The next chapter will provide an overview of the research method and statistical analyses used. To describe the processes used to answer the research question, six sub-sections are outlined: research design and participants, sampling procedure, measures, research procedure, ethical considerations and statistical analyses.

Method

Research Design

Since this study is of an exploratory nature, its aim is two-fold: (1) to evaluate the dimensionality of the instrument used to measure organisational choice and (2) to evaluate how job seekers differ in respect of their indicators when making organisational choices. This two-tiered objective warrants a quantitative approach, thus indicating that the research problem will be addressed from a positivist view (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

With the research questions in mind, this study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design. Since there is no intention to manipulate any of the variables of interest to infer causality, a descriptive approach was selected. The intention was to describe relationships as they occur naturally (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2013). Moreover, while the importance of longitudinal data is recognised for enabling a stability assessment of these constructs over time (Mouton & Babbie, 2001; Veldsman, 2018), the current researcher collected data as a once-off exercise to reflect respondents' perceptions of the research question.

Respondents

The population of interest for the current study is potential South African job seekers. A convenience sample of students completing their tertiary education at a South African university and preparing to become job seekers, was thus selected. University students have been shown to form a huge proportion of job-seekers in South Africa, as can be seen in the graduate unemployment rate of 33.5% (Statistics South Africa, 2018). Essentially, one in every three graduates in the labour market is unemployed and is searching for gainful employment (Statistics South Africa, 2018)., It is therefore reasonable to assume that a sample of university students would be a suitable sample to meet the objectives of this study.

To ensure an acceptable response rate, students from various departments within different faculties were approached, so as to identify study participants. A total of 340 respondents completed the questionnaire. The final sample consisted of 330 ($N = 330$) students currently registered at a metropolitan university in South Africa. The majority of respondents were between 21 and 23 years of age ($n = 174$, 52.7%). Women comprised 54.8% ($n = 181$) of the sample. People of white ethnicity comprised 49.4% ($n = 163$) of the sample – a slight

overrepresentation when compared to the larger South African demographic makeup. There were only a few doctoral students (.9%, $n=3$), while 13% ($n=43$) of participants were enrolled for other qualifications which were not provided for in the questionnaire, such as post-graduate diplomas. A large majority of students in the sample are registered in the Commerce Faculty (36.1%, $n=119$) while the Law Faculty had the fewest respondents (2.7%, $n=9$). Table 1 below illustrates further demographic information.

Table 1
Demographic Statistics of Participants($n=330$)

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age group	18-20 years	83	25.2%
	21-23 years	174	52.7%
	24-26 years	39	11.8%
	Older than 26 years	33	10%
Gender	Women	181	54.8%
	Men	146	44.2%
	Gender neutral	1	.3%
	Prefer not to respond	1	.3%
Race	African	86	26.1%
	Coloured	47	14.2%
	Indian/Asian	25	7.65
	Other	4	1.2%
	Prefer not to respond	4	1.2%
	White	163	49.4%
Highest Level of Education	Grade 12	151	45.8%
	Bachelor's Degree	99	30%
	Honours Degree	55	16.&%
	Masters Degree	3	.9%
	Other	21	6.4%
Current year of study	First year	42	12.7%

	Second year	46	13.9%
	Third year	55	16.7%
	Fourth year	48	14.5%
	Honours	71	21.5%
	Masters	21	6.4%
	doctorate	3	.9%
	other	43	13%
Faculty	Commerce	119	36.1%
	Engineering	67	20.3%
	Health Sciences	36	10.9%
	Humanities	71	21.5%
	Law	9	2.7%
	Science	25	7.6%
Family income (p/m)	0 - R10 000	24	7.3%
	R10 000 – R20 000	37	11.2%
	R20 000- R30 000	37	11.2%
	>R30 000PM	168	50.9%
	Prefer not to respond	61	18.5%
	Missing data	3	.9%

Instrument

The measuring instrument used in the current study was the Organisational Choice Indicator or OCI, developed by Van der Merwe (2013). The OCI was adapted for application in the current research. The original version of this instrument consisted of two sections, each consisting of 33 items (Van der Merwe, 2013). It was developed to measure job-seekers opinions about organisational choice indicators, albeit having been based in a different context from that of the current study. For this reason, the measurement instrument was deemed appropriate for the current research. Nonetheless, the original measurement instrument's 22 minutes completion time was deemed too long and the questionnaire was therefore shortened for use in this study by omitting additional non-relevant sections. Instead of using all the sections in the original instrument, this study made use of the first section and only half of the

second section of the OCI. As such, the shortened OCI focused only on the 33 indicators on which respondents rated themselves. The second half of section two that required respondents to rate their peers' perceptions was omitted (Van der Merwe, 2013). It was deemed important that the measurement instrument be as short as possible to avoid being too time-consuming and inducing response burden of participants (Rolstad & Rydén, 2011).

The first section of the measurement instrument commences with close-ended questions on both nominal (e.g. gender) and ordinal scales (e.g. level of education, age group), to access respondents' demographic information. The second section comprised 33 OCI items that were presented in a random, close-ended and ordinal nature, whereby respondents were required to rate the extent to which they would consider each of the items as important during job-seeking. The items of the second section used a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*'Not at all'*) to 6 (*"To a very large extent"*). The eight items that sought to investigate whether and the extent to which respondents consider indicators related to organisational *ethical reputation*, were concealed by interspersing them amongst other items with less focus on ethical reputation. This would potentially help reduce the chance of socially desirable responses. Presenting ethics-related items sequentially prevented the potential temptation respondents may have had to provide answers they deemed to be desirable.

Items included in the shortened OCI included *"Salary (financial package) that an organisation offers"*, *"Geographical location of an organisation"* and *"An organisation that follows fair selection and promotion practices"*, with the latter indicator being an example of one of the eight items formulated to gauge respondents likelihood to consider ethical reputation in their job search endeavours. Upon the completion of the final draft of the questionnaire, a pilot study of the questionnaire was conducted with a small group of 10 respondents in order to ascertain the time it would take to complete the revised and shortened version of the OCI , the user-friendliness of the instrument, as well as clarity of items. This small group consisted of a micro sample of the main sample of participants (students at a South African university).

Sampling Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission to distribute questionnaires to students was requested and obtained from the university management through two processes. First, an ethical clearance application was submitted to the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee (see Appendix B). Upon receiving ethical approval, permission to access students as participants was obtained from the university's Department of Student Affairs. Ten hard copies of the instrument were then piloted on a group of ten students. Upon questionnaire completion they were required to provide feedback on the following characteristics of the questionnaire: font type and size, instructions and item clarity, as well as their comfort with responding to the measurement instruments items. Three participants from the pilot group suggested that having the 33 organisational choice indicators listed along a full A4 page created the illusion of there being too many items to rate, hence the subsequent printing of questionnaires in booklet format. There were therefore fewer items on each page since the survey booklets were printed in A5 format.

Following the pilot study, the distribution of the booklet-format measurement instrument commenced. The researcher focused on administering the questionnaires at student saturated areas around campus during the lunch hours. These areas included cafeterias, food courts, foyers and study rooms. At each questionnaire administration session, the overall objective and purpose of the study was explained to students, as well as the approximate duration of questionnaire completion. This unfolded by audibly reading out the introductory paragraph of the questionnaire. This introduction explained that the research was aimed at exploring their opinions about which indicators influence job-seekers' choice of organisations for which to work. The researcher then informed prospective respondents that the questionnaire would take no longer than 12 minutes to complete.

Ethical Considerations

Albeit that the survey was deemed non-invasive in nature, as it merely gauged perceptions rather than elicit responses with emotional content, the respondents were informed that they could withdraw their participation at any point without any penalty. Thereafter, potential respondents were informed about the anonymity of their responses as they were not required to provide any information that would make them identifiable. The confidentiality with which their responses would be handled was explained, as well as the fact that their responses would be used for research purposes only. Following this briefing, participants were given opportunities to ask any questions they might have had. Once they all understood the purpose of the research and their free will to participate, respondents were invited to complete the questionnaire. The data was gathered over an approximate period of three- and a half weeks from mid-August to September 2019. Following this, the data were exported into Microsoft Excel for preliminary analyses of respondents' demographic information.

Data Analyses

Data obtained through the OCI was captured in excel and analysed using the 25th version of the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS).

Descriptive Statistics of the OCI. Using percentages, data obtained from the second section of the OCI was described. This was done with the aim of assessing the number of respondents per item of organisational choice on the 6 point Likert-type scale. In this way, the level of importance attached to each indicator was illuminated.

Description of ranked indicators/items. Frequencies and percentages are used to describe indicators rated by respondents to be the most, second, third, fourth and fifth most important to organisational choice decisions.

Factor structure of the OCI. The Organisational Choice Indicator scale included thirty-three items that could be considered by potential job seekers when choosing employers. Given the main aim of this research to assess the level of importance attached to organisational ethical reputation as an indicator of choice, it was deemed necessary to ascertain whether the eight items formulated to assess this indicator were valid measures of this construct (Field, 2013; Hair, Anderson, Babin & Black, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014). Exploratory Factor

Analysis (EFA) was conducted to establish the construct validity of these eight ethics-related items. The EFA was however applied to all 33 items in order to determine the overall factor structure of the OCI.

Given that it would emphasise the latent factors by focusing on the shared variance between the 33 items of organisational choice, Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) was used to extract factors (Henson & Roberts, 2006). PAF was therefore deemed more suitable than Principal Component Analysis (PCA), which only reduces multiple variables into fewer components, without the focus on the latent factor (Henson & Roberts, 2006). To enhance interpretation, oblique rotation (direct oblimin) was used. Since findings from previous research suggest there to be a correlation between factors within each sub-scale of the OCI (example, factors between the 8-item ethical reputation subscale within the larger OCI scale) (Van der Merwe, 2013) oblique was selected over orthogonal. To summarize, PAF with direct oblimin rotation was used to evaluate the construct validity of the OCI scale, as well as its dimensionality.

Before PAF with direct oblimin was conducted, it was crucial to ascertain that two assumptions were assessed. First, EFA cannot be performed without adequate distribution of data. This assumption is met when the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy is larger than .50 (Kaiser, 1974). The second assumption is the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, which is used to test scale items correlations (Bartlett, 1950; Pallant, 2010). A significant test ($p < .05$) indicates that items within a scale correlate adequately with one another for sufficient factorability of the data (Bartlett, 1950).

Additionally, Kaiser's (1960; 1970; 1974) criterion regarding which factors to retain, was used. The criterion requires that only factors with *eigenvalues* greater than one be extracted (referred to commonly as the eigenvalue greater than one rule). Items with factor loadings greater than .30 were considered to load significantly onto their respective factors and were thus retained (Gorsuch, 1983; Pallant, 2010; Thurstone, 1947). Eigenvalues indicate the proportion of variance associated with the total variance of a factor (Hair, Black, Babim, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The communalities of items were also inspected. Any item with a communality less than .30 ought to be omitted from further analysis, as it indicates that the item does not adequately relate to other items in the same factor (Field, 2013; Pallant, 2010). Other items that should be excluded from analysis are those that significantly load onto more than one factor, with a loading difference smaller than .25; as they would indicate cross-loading

(Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014). Cross-loading makes it difficult for a researcher to understand which latent variable accounts for the item and may also indicate that the item measures more than one separate dimension. In addition, scree plot inspection (Cattell, 1966) and parallel analysis (Horn, 1965) were used to arrive at the final decision regarding the number of extractable factors.

Cronbach's alpha (α) was used to measure the internal consistency reliability of OCI subscales that emerged from the EFA (Field, 2013, Pallant, 2010). The guidelines for interpreting Cronbach's alpha are as follows: $\alpha < .50$ indicates unacceptable internal consistency, $.50 > \alpha > .60$ shows dubious internal consistency, $.60 > \alpha > .70$ = acceptable internal consistency, $.70 > \alpha > .80$ = good internal consistency, and $\alpha > .90$ shows excellent internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the extent to which an individual item is correlated to the total score was assessed using corrected item-total correlations and only items with scores greater than .30 were retained (Pallant, 2010).

Mean differences in consideration of ethical reputation. To explore the existence of differences in consideration of Ethical Reputation (ER) between job seekers of different genders and family incomes, the following null and alternative hypotheses were formulated:

$$H_0: \text{Mean}_{\text{Male ER}} = \text{Mean}_{\text{Female ER}}$$

$$H_{1a}: \text{Mean}_{\text{Male ER}} \neq \text{Mean}_{\text{Female ER}}$$

$$H_{1b}: \text{Mean}_{\text{Female ER}} > \text{Mean}_{\text{Male ER}}$$

$$H_0: \text{Mean}_{\text{Less than *R30k/month ER}} = \text{Mean}_{\text{Greater than R30k/month ER}}$$

$$H_{2a}: \text{Mean}_{\text{Less than R30k/month ER}} \neq \text{Mean}_{\text{Greater than R30k/month ER}}$$

$$H_{2b}: \text{Mean}_{\text{Greater than R30k/month ER}} > \text{Mean}_{\text{Less than R30k/month ER}}$$

* k denotes 1000

Given that each of these hypotheses aims to assess significant differences in means between male and female job seekers' considerations of ethical reputation when choosing an employer, as well as mean differences in consideration of ER by job seekers from higher and lower family income levels: independent samples T-tests were used. The test was appropriate given that the differences assessed are between two independent sample means (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2013).

For an exploration of mean differences in organisational ethical reputation consideration between groups of job seekers from the Engineering, Commerce and Humanities faculties – the following hypotheses were tested using a one way independent analysis of variance (ANOVA), with planned contrasts.

$$H_0: \text{Mean}_{\text{EBE ER}} = \text{Mean}_{\text{Humanities \& Commerce ER}}$$

$$H_{3a}: \text{Mean}_{\text{EBE ER}} \neq \text{Mean}_{\text{Humanities \& Commerce ER}}$$

$$H_{3b}: \text{Mean}_{\text{EBE ER}} > \text{Mean}_{\text{Humanities \& Commerce ER}}$$

One-way independent ANOVA was deemed suitable because the aim was to compare between means of three different groups of ethical reputation considerations (Field, 2013). In addition, the test was conducted using planned contrasts instead of *post hoc* because the current researcher had generated specific hypotheses, as seen above. In line with these hypotheses – comparisons were decided upon in a format displayed in table 2.9 below:

Table 2.9

Orthogonal contrasts for academic disciplines and ethical reputation data

Group	Dummy variable 1 (Contrast ₁)	Dummy variable 2 (Contrast ₂)	Product (Contrast ₁ × Contrast ₂)
EBE (Engineering & the Built Environment)	-2	0	0
Humanities	1	-1	-1
Commerce	1	1	1
Total	0	0	0

As it was anticipated that the mean for EBE would be greater than that of commerce and humanities, the first contrast compared EBE against the latter faculties combined. The second contrast compared humanities and commerce faculties against one another. The weightings observed in table 2.9 above are in accordance with the rules of planned contrasts outlined by Field (2013). These are: comparing negatively coded groups with positively coded ones; assigning 0 to any group not involved in a comparison; ascertaining that the weights in a given contrast are equal to the number of chunks in the opposite variation and lastly, ascertaining that the sum of weights in each comparison equals 0. It can be seen in table 2.9 above, that all these rules were adhered to respectively. In the section below, study findings are presented.

Results

This chapter will present the following findings from the current study: construct validity, internal consistency and descriptive statistics associated with each indicator, factor , as well as results from hypotheses testing.

Descriptive Statistics of Organisational Choice Indicators

In order to establish the number of respondents who selected each indicator, as well as the extent to which they would consider that factor when making an organisational choice – selections were expressed as percentages. Percentages would also enable the researcher to make comparisons between indicator selections and for a clearer, easier interpretation; responses were analysed collectively by collapsing the percentages of respondents' choices on each Likert scale from six to three categories. These categories are: (1) *To no and a small extent*, (2) *To some and a moderate extent*, and (3) *To a large and very large extent*. Table 2 below illustrates participants' perceptions about the extent to which they would consider each of the 33 potential indicators when choosing organisations for which to work. All 330 respondents selected the extent to which they value each of the indicators and as a result, there were no options left unselected.

Table 2.1

Responses per Item/Indicator of Organisational Choice

	To no and a small extent	To some and a moderate extent	To a large and very large extent
1 Geographical location of the organisation.	8.2	34	57.8
2 An organisation that cares for the environment (recycles etc.).	15.8	52.1	32.1
3 An organisation where friends, relatives or other acquaintances with similar personalities and preferences work.	46.1	41.2	12.7
4 The image ("brand") of the organisation.	13.4	41.5	45.1
5 The salary (financial package) that the organisation offers.	2.7	26.7	70.6
6 An organisation that follows fair selection and promotion practices.	1.2	24.2	74.6
7 An organisation that is environmentally conscious.	13.3	43.6	43.1
8 An organisation that has a trade union that prevents abuse of employees.	9.8	36.6	53.6
9 An organisation that has the approval of my friends and family.	33	46	21
10 An organisation that provides its employees intellectual challenges.	4.2	22.2	73.6
11 An organisation where transport is available to and from work.	35.8	38.2	26
12 An organisation where there are personal growth opportunities.	2.7	13.3	84
13 An organisation that is values-driven.	2.4	29.7	67.9

14 The extent to which the organisation offers fringe benefits (e.g., medical aid/insurance, pension scheme).	5.4	38.8	55.7
15 The types of products/services of the organisation.	10.6	45.2	44.2
16 The organisation's size.	31.5	51.5	17
17 An organisation that is globally connected.	14.6	42.4	43
18 An organisation that provides opportunities for promotion.	3.3	23.3	73.4
19 An organisation that offers training and development opportunities to its employees.	2.4	26.4	71.2
20 The organisation's status within the country.	11.2	54.8	34
2. An organisation that is growing fast.	16.6	60.6	22.8
22 An organisation that practises Employment Equity/Affirmative Action.	14	40.5	45.5
23 An organisation that provides opportunities for developing employees' skills and talents.	0.3	21.9	77.8
24 An organisation that is free of fraud and corruption.	1.2	13	85.8
25 An organisation that treats everyone it interacts with respectfully.	0.6	11.2	88.2
26 An organisation that promotes BEE (Black Economic Empowerment).	18.5	41.5	40
27 The age of the organisation (how well it is established).	31.6	50.6	17.8
28 The ethics of the organisation.	3.4	20	76.6
29 An organisation that takes its responsibility to the community seriously.	4.6	38.2	57.2

30 The organisational culture (such as good relationships amongst employees/open door policy/managers caring about employees).	1.6	19.6	78.8
31 An organisation that is well known through its marketing/advertising.	24	59.7	16.3
32 Any organisation that is willing to give me a job.	30.3	30.9	38.8
33 They will work for any organisation, as long as the pay is good.	49.3	34.6	16.1

Note. All values are expressed at percentages.

As seen in table 2.1 above, an organisational choice indicator with the highest consideration to a large and very large extent was “*An organisation that treats everyone it interacts with respectfully*”, 88.2% of respondents; followed by the item “*An organisation that is free of fraud and corruption*” (85.8%) and “*The organisational culture (such as good relationships amongst employees/open door policy/managers caring about employees)*”(78.8%). On the other hand, respondents indicated that the item they would consider the least when choosing workplaces (to no and to a small extent) was “*They will work for any organisation, as long as the pay is good*”(49.3%), and 60.6 percent of them are most neutral about the item “*An organisation that is growing fast*” as an organisational choice factor (to some and a moderate extent). Please refer to table 2.1 for a comprehensive overview of responses per indicator.

Descriptive Statistics of Ranked Indicators

The last section of the OCI questionnaire required participants to rank each of the 33 potential indicators of organisational choice into 5 rank orders: *the most important factor, second most important, third most important, fourth most important and fifth most important factor*. The results are presented in table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2

Ranking of Indicators by potential job seekers (n = 330)

Level of importance	Top 5 indicators per category (most important to fifth most important)	Frequency	Percentage*
Most important factor	5 The salary (financial package) that the organisation offers.	64	19.4
	10 An organisation that provides its employees intellectual challenges.	33	10.0
	12 An organisation where there are personal growth opportunities.	28	8.5
	30 The organisational culture (such as good relationships amongst employees/open door policy/managers caring about employees).	24	7.3
	28 The ethics of the organisation.	19	5.8
Second most important	5 The salary (financial package) that the organisation offers.	43	13.0
	1 Geographical location of the organisation.	42	12.7
	12 An organisation where there are personal growth opportunities.	25	7.6
	10 An organisation that provides its employees intellectual challenges.	24	7.3
	30 The organisational culture (such as good relationships amongst employees/open door policy/managers caring about employees).	20	6.1
Third most important	5 The salary (financial package) that the organisation offers.	33	10.0
	12 An organisation where there are personal growth opportunities.	28	8.5
	1 Geographical location of the organisation.	25	7.6
	13 An organisation that is values-driven.	19	5.8
	28 The ethics of the organisation.	15	4.5

Fourth most important	5	The salary (financial package) that the organisation offers.	23	7.0
	28	The ethics of an organisation		
			21	6.4
	10	An organisation that provides its employees intellectual challenges.	20	6.1
	19	An organisation that offers training and development opportunities to its employees.	18	5.5
	24	An organisation that is free of fraud and corruption.	17	5.2
Fifth most important	30	The organisational culture (such as good relationships amongst employees/open door policy/managers caring about employees).	24	7.3
	5	The salary (financial package) that the organisation offers.	21	6.4
	25	An organisation that treats everyone it interacts with respectfully.		
			20	6.1
	28	The ethics of an organisation	19	5.8
	24	An organisation that is free of fraud and corruption.	18	5.5

*Due to item non response, percentages are per the number of respondents, $n=319$.

It can be understood from the table 2.2 above that the majority of those who responded to the ranked indicators part of the questionnaire, selected item 5 (*financial package that the organisation offers*), as the most important factor they would consider when making organisational choices (19.4%). This is followed by *An organisation that provides its employees intellectual challenges* (10%), *An organisation where there are personal growth opportunities* (8.5%) and *The organisational culture* (7.3). *The ethics of an organisation* also forms part of the top 5 indicators job seekers consider to be the most important, when choosing employers.

Salary was again selected by the majority of respondents as the second most important (13%), third most important (10%) , fourth most important (7%) and fifth most important factor (6.4%). This indicates that while the importance of financial remuneration is considered to

varying degrees amongst the respondents – its consistent appearance in the top of each rank suggests that it is generally regarded as more important than many of the other indicators.

Looking at table 2.2 above, it is evident that items relating to organisational ethical reputation also appear consistently in the top 5. These items include *Ethics of an organisation*, which appears first as the most important indicator (5.8%), third most important (4.5%), fourth most important (6.4%) and fifth most important (6.1%). Other ethics related items that appear in the top five of those considered to be very important organisational choice indicators include *An organisation that is values-driven* (5.8%), *An organisation that is free of fraud and corruption* (5.2%), and *An organisation that treats everyone it interacts with respectfully* (6.4%).

Structure of the Measurement Scale: OCI

The results of the EFA indicated a KMO value of .815 and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2(528) = 3987.678, p < 0.001$), thus indicating the suitability of conducting EFA across all items. Exploratory Factor Analysis showed that the communalities of all 33 items meet the .40 cut-off (Zwick, Velicer, 1986). These communalities ranged from .48 (*An organisation that follows fair selection and promotion practices*), to .82 (*An organisation that cares for the environment (recycle etc)*).

Figure 1

Scree plot – 33 Items of organisational choice

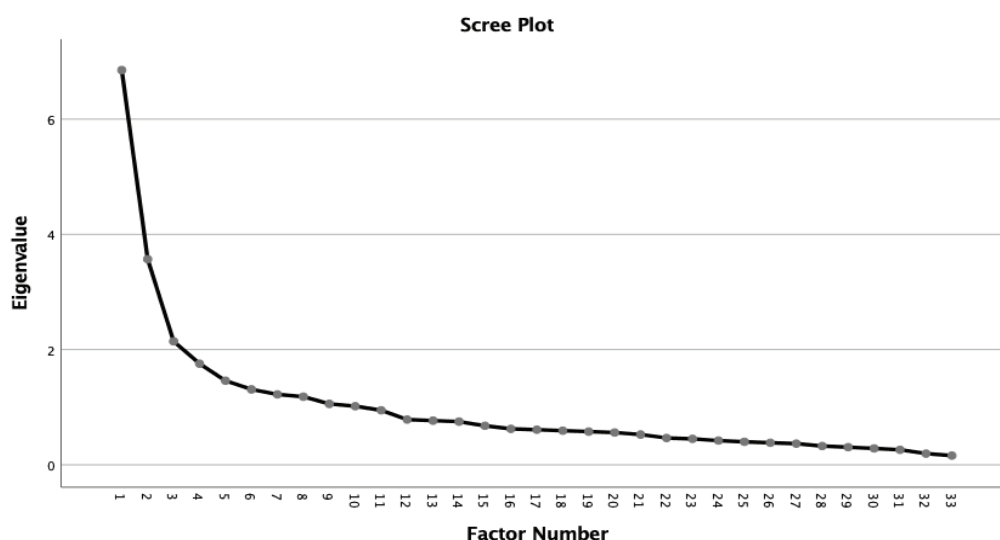


Table 2.3

Total Variance Explained – EFA on all 33 items

Factor	Initial eigenvalues			Extraction sums of squared loadings			Rotation sums of squared loadings
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	6.85	20.76	20.76	6.85	20.76	20.76	4.14
2	3.57	10.82	31.58	3.57	10.82	31.58	3.95
3	2.14	6.50	38.07	2.14	6.49	38.07	3.11
4	1.76	5.32	43.39	1.76	5.32	43.39	2.31
5	1.46	4.42	47.81	1.46	4.42	47.81	2.40
6	1.31	3.97	51.78	1.31	3.97	51.78	2.74
7	1.22	3.70	55.48	1.22	3.70	55.48	1.91
8	1.18	3.58	59.06	1.18	3.58	59.06	3.67
9	1.06	3.20	62.27	1.06	3.20	62.27	2.31
10	1.02	3.08	65.35	1.02	3.08	65.35	1.20
11	0.95	2.87	68.22				
12	0.79	2.38	70.60				
13	0.77	2.33	72.93				
14	0.75	2.27	75.20				
15	0.68	2.05	77.251				
16	0.62	1.89	79.14				
17	0.61	1.85	80.99				
18	0.60	1.80	82.78				
19	0.58	1.75	84.53				
20	0.56	1.70	86.23				
21	0.53	1.60	87.82				
22	0.47	1.41	89.23				
23	0.45	1.37	90.60				
24	0.42	1.28	91.87				
25	0.40	1.21	93.08				
26	0.38	1.16	94.24				
27	0.37	1.12	95.36				
28	0.33	.99	96.34				
29	0.31	.93	97.27				
30	0.29	.86	98.14				
31	0.26	.79	98.93				
32	0.20	.59	99.52				

33	0.16	.48	100.000
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Based on Kaiser’s criterion of extracting only factors with eigenvalues greater than one, 10 factors were extractable (Kaiser, 1950, 1970; 1974). As can be seen in table 2.3 above, 65.4% of total variance was explained by these 10 factors. Of these 10, only five had a minimum of three items with substantial factor loadings. This resulted in the omission of five factors -given that they could not be meaningfully interpreted due to the small item contingent for each factor (Gorsuch, 1983; Pallant, 2010). To further validate the omission of these factors, the scree plot was observed (see figure 1 above). As can be seen, only five factors can be counted above the inflection point in the plot and Cattell (1966) advises that only such factors ought to be extracted. The final method used to determine the number of factors to retain was parallel analysis (Horn, 1965), using Watkins’ (2000) Monte Carlo program.

In parallel analysis, eigenvalues obtained in the Total Variance Explained table are systematically compared with the average eigenvalues of a 100 random samples generated by the Monte Carlo program (Horn, 1965). The first eigenvalue obtained in the SPSS output is compared with its corresponding first value generated in the parallel analysis (Horn, 1965). If the SPSS value is larger than the criterion value from the analysis, the factor is retained and rejected if the value is smaller (Horn, 1965; Pallant, 2010). Table 2.4 displays results from the parallel analysis.

Table 2.4

Comparison of eigenvalues from EFA and their corresponding Monte Carlo generated criterion values

Factor number	Actual eigenvalue from EFA	Criterion value from Monte Carlo analysis	Decision
1	6.85	1.65	Accept
2	3.57	1.56	Accept
3	2.14	1.49	Accept
4	1.76	1.44	Accept
5	1.46	1.39	Accept
6	1.31	1.35	Reject
7	1.22	1.31	Reject

8	1.18	1.27	Reject
9	1.06	1.23	Reject
10	1.02	1.19	Reject

As seen in this table, the first five factors had eigenvalues larger than their corresponding criterion values while the bottom five had lower. As per the aforementioned criterion with parallel analysis, only these top five factors were accordingly retained, thus further confirming the earlier decision to extract only five factors, instead of ten.

Altogether, the five retained factors explain the majority of the variance, 47.81%. Nonetheless, the fifth was further omitted because only 2 items had significant factor loadings – thus resulting in a final four-factor model. Factor 1 has 12 items, accounted for the majority of total variance (20.76%) and was labelled *Organisational features*. Most of the items with the highest loadings onto factor two were items related to organisational ethical behaviour, the factor was therefore labelled *Organisational ethical reputation* and it accounted for 10.82% of total variance. The eight-item factor three was labelled *Organisational opportunities and benefits* (6.5% variance) and the three-item factor four labelled *Socio-economic benefits* (5.32% variance). Please see table 2.5 below for a detailed description of these four factors. Their internal consistency reliability results are displayed and discussed shortly after.

Table 2.5
Description of Factors

Factor number	Factor Name	# of Items	Item Description	Factor Loading
1	Organisational features ($\alpha = 0.82$)	12	16 The organisation's size.	0.72
			20 The organisation's status within the country.	0.70
			17 An organisation that is globally connected.	0.67
			27 The age of the organisation (how well it is established).	0.65
			31 An organisation that is well known through its marketing/advertising	0.65
			21 An organisation that is growing fast.	0.59
			4 The image ("brand") of the organisation.	0.58
			15 The types of products/services of the organisation.	0.47

2	Organisational ethical reputation ($\alpha = 0.81$)	9	9 An organisation my friends and family approve of	0.42
			3 An organisation where my friends and relatives work	0.41
			5 The salary (financial package that the organisation offers.	0.36
			14 The extent to which the organisation offers fringe benefits (e.g medical aid, insurance).	0.72
			7 An organisation that is environmentally conscious	0.69
			8 An organisation that has a trade union that prevents abuse of employees.	0.62
			2 An organisation that cares for the environment (recycle etc).	0.62
			29 An organisation that takes its responsibility to the community seriously.	0.60
			22 An organisation that practises Employment Equity/Affirmative Action.	0.57
			26 An organisation that promotes BEE (Black Economic Empowerment).	0.54
3	Organisational opportunities ($\alpha = 0.82$)	8	24 An organisation that is free of fraud and corruption.	0.48
			28 The ethics of the organisation.	0.46
			6 An organisation that follows fair selection and promotion practices.	0.76
			12 An organisation where there are personal growth opportunities	0.71
			19 An organisation that offers training and development opportunities to its employees.	0.68
			23 An organisation that provides opportunities of developing employees' skills and talents.	0.65
			13 An organisation that is values-driven	0.57
			30 The organisational culture (such as good relationships amongst employees/open door policy/managers caring about employees).	0.56

			18 An organisation that provides opportunities for promotion.	0.51
			10 An organisation that provides its employees intellectual challenges.	0.46
			25 An organisation that treats everyone it interacts with respectfully.	0.42
4	Socio-economic benefits ($\alpha = 0.53$)	3	32 Any organisation that is willing to give me a job.	0.71
			33 I will work for any organisation as long as the “pay is good”.	0.63
			11 An organisation where transport is available to and from work.	0.33

Internal Consistency of Measurement Scales

As presented in table 2.6 below, three OCI subscales extracted from EFA demonstrated good internal consistencies, with the Cronbach’s alpha ranging from .81 (*Organisational Ethical Reputation*) to .82 (*Organisational Features and Organisational Opportunities*). The subscales are therefore internally consistent measures of their respective facets of organisational choice indicators accordingly. The *Socio-economic Benefits* scale on the other hand, presented with a dubious internal consistency - albeit not unacceptable. This could potentially be explained by the presence of only three items within this scale.

Table 2.6

Results from Reliability Analyses

	Cronbach’s alpha (α)	Corrected item total correlations
Organisational Ethical Reputation	.81	.44 < r < .60
Organisational Features	.82	.68 < r < .64

Organisational Opportunities	.82	.43 < r < .64
Socio-economic Benefits	.53	.19 < r < .44

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2.7

Descriptive statistics of four sub-scales of the Organisational Choice Indicator scale

	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness		Kurtosis	
					Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
Organisational Ethical Reputation	4.90	.69	2.63	6.00	-.67	.13	.31	.268
Organisational Features	3.73	.88	1.00	6.00	-.17	.13	.09	.268
Organisational Opportunities	5.01	.67	2.67	6.00	-.91	.13	.85	.268
Socio-economic Benefits	4.47	1.2	1.33	6.00	-.52	.13	-.47	.268

Note. $N = 234$; M = mean; SD = standard error deviation; min = minimum; max = maximum; SE = standard error

Table 2. 7 above represents the descriptive statistics for all four sub scales. As can be observed in the table, organisational choice indicators related to benefits and opportunities offered by organisations on average appear to be considered relatively more important ($M=5.01$, $SD=.67$), than those related to the other three factors ($3.73 < M < 4.90$). This table also indicates the distribution of scores on all four subscales was acceptably normal, given

that the skewness values fell well below 2.00 and kurtosis values well below 4.00 (as seen in table 2.7 above).

The next half of this study presents mean differences in consideration of organisational ethical reputations between job seekers of different genders, academic disciplines and family income levels. Findings from independent t-tests analyses and ANOVA are presented.

Differences in Means

Before using the independent t-test to assess mean differences in consideration of ethical reputation, certain assumptions had to be assessed. They are discussed below.

Assumptions of Independent t-tests

Independence of observations. This assumption is about ascertaining that observations within a dataset are independent of one another, that is; each observation must not be influenced by the other one (Pallant, 2013). This assumption has not been violated in the current study because responses have been grouped according to mutually exclusive gender categories of males and females. Similarly, responses are grouped according to mutually exclusive income level categories of higher and lower income levels. A respondent's score will be in either 0 (less than 30K/month) or 1 (greater than that 30K/month), but not both. The assumption of score independence is therefore assumed in the present study.

Normal distribution of scores. This assumption stipulates that the distribution of scores ought to be normal. In accordance with Stonehouse and Forrester (1998), bootstrapping was carried out in order to account for any potential violations to normality. This assumption was therefore ignored -given that 1000 bootstrapped samples were computed.

Homogeneity of variance. This is an assumption that samples obtained from the population have equal variance; that score variability between groups is similar (Field, 2013; Pallant, 2013). This was tested using Levene's test of homogeneity of variance. In order for this assumption to be met, the test has to be non-significant at the 5% significance level (i.e., $p > .05$). For gender differences in ethical reputation (ER) means, this assumption has not been violated because Levene's test was not significant, ($F(1,325) = .12, p = .731$). However, for family income levels the test was significant ($F(2,327) = 13.27, p = .000$). This suggests that the variance of the group of job seekers with monthly family incomes of greater than R30k is not equal to that of those in the less than R30k a month group. Nonetheless, Pallant (2013)

advises that as this is not a cause for concern because t-tests provide two sets of results, the researcher will thus consult the appropriate sets of t-test results (i.e., equal variances not assumed), for the subsequent t-test.

Independent Samples t-test results. Having established that the data acceptably meets the assumptions of independent t-test, it was deemed appropriate to conduct the test. On average, female job seekers ($M=4.96$, $SE=0.05$) consider ethical reputations of organisations more than their male counterparts ($M=4.82$, $SE=.0.06$), when choosing workplaces. This difference, .15, BCa 95% CI [-0.005, 0.300] is however, not statistically significant , $t(325)=1.90$, $P=.06$.

On average, job seekers from family income levels higher than R30 000/month ($M=4.99$, $SE=0.04$) consider organisations' ethical reputation more than those from family income levels less than R30 000/month ($M=4.44$, $SE=0.07$). This difference, 0.55, BCa 95% CI [0.385, 0.719] was significant $t(164)=6.51$, $P=.000$. The difference presented a medium effect size according to Cohen's D convention ($r=0.46$) and therefore indicates a significant difference.

One-way Independent Analysis of Variance

Before conducting ANOVA to test for mean differences in consideration of ethical reputation between job seekers from different academic backgrounds, the following assumptions were first tested.

Assumptions for one-way ANOVA. Given the significance of Levene's test, ($F(2,254) = 5.22$, $p = .006$), the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated. This again meant that the results of the ANOVA would be observed from the appropriate sections of the output (for example, F-ratios would be observed from the Welch and Brown-Forsythe statistics, instead of the main ANOVA output table). The assumption about the independence of scores has also been accounted for , given that comparisons would be made between ethical reputation means of three, mutually exclusive groups of job-seekers: an observation would be either from the EBE , HUMANITIES or the COMMERCE faculty group – not both/all.

Results from one-way ANOVA. There was a significant mean difference of Ethical Reputation (ER) consideration by job seekers from the EBE, Commerce and Humanities academic disciplines, $F(2, 181.16)=29.96$, $p=.000$, $r=.45$. Using a benchmark for effect sizes,

these differences present a medium – almost large effect, given its closeness to the .5 threshold for a large effect size (Field, 2013). The finding that job seekers from the aforementioned faculties consider organisations' ER to varying degrees is therefore considerably substantive. Table 3 below illustrates results from planned contrasts.

Table 2.8

Results from planned contrasts

		Contrast	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	sig(2-tailed)
Organisational ethical reputation	Assume equal variances	1	7.13	254	.000*
		2	4.57	254	.000
	Does not assume equal variances	1	6.21	93.8	.000
		2	5.07	150.0	.000

* $p < .01$

Planned contrasts revealed that prospective employees with EBE academic backgrounds consider ethical reputations of organisations significantly less than those with Commerce and Humanities backgrounds, $t(93.8)=6.21$, $p=.000$, $r=.54$. This finding is substantial, given the large effect size. Furthermore, results from the second contrast show that organisational ethical reputation is considered by job seekers from Humanities faculties significantly more than those from Commerce, $t(150)=5.07$, $p=.000$, $r=.38$. This finding presents a medium effect.

Summary of Results

The findings presented above indicate that certain group differences of South African job seekers contribute to the extent to which they consider organisational ethical reputation when choosing jobs. Specifically, differences in the consideration of organisations' ethical reputations were found between job seekers of different gender; those from different family income levels and those from different university faculties. The table below presents a summary of all hypotheses tested, their findings, as well as whether they were supported or disproved accordingly.

Table 3.1
Summary of findings

Primary research question	Hypotheses	Data Analytic Procedure	Status
To what extent do certain group differences of South African job seekers contribute to whether and the extent to which they consider organisational ethical reputation when choosing jobs?	H_{1a} : $\text{Mean}_{\text{Male ER}} \neq \text{Mean}_{\text{Female ER}}$	Independent t-test	Supported
	H_{1b} : $\text{Mean}_{\text{Female ER}} > \text{Mean}_{\text{Male ER}}$	Independent t-test	Unsupported
	H_{2a} : $\text{Mean}_{\text{Less than R30k/month ER}} \neq \text{Mean}_{\text{Greater than R30k/month ER}}$	Independent t-test	Supported
	H_{2b} : $\text{Mean}_{\text{Greater than R30k/month ER}} > \text{Mean}_{\text{Less than R30k/month ER}}$	Independent t-test	Supported
	H_{3a} : $\text{Mean}_{\text{EBE ER}} \neq \text{Mean}_{\text{Humanities \& Commerce ER}}$	ANOVA	Supported
	H_{3b} : $\text{Mean}_{\text{EBE ER}} > \text{Mean}_{\text{Humanities \& Commerce ER}}$	ANOVA	Unsupported

In the chapter below, a discussion of research findings is provided, along with recommendations for future research as well as a conclusion to the current research respectively.

Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusion

Within a host of factors that have been linked to the attractiveness of organisations to potential employees, organisational ethical reputation has increasingly received attention as a vital indicator of organisational choice for job seekers (Agarwal et al., 2017; Clardy, 2005; Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010; Walker & Dyck 2014; Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson, & Beatty, 2009; Williamson, King, Lapak, & Sarma, 2010). Given South Africa's economic realities of high unemployment rates; high skills shortages owing to low educational levels; low income; low living standards; and high-income inequality (Anand, Kothari & Kumar, 2016; Oluwajodu et al., 2015) – whether and the extent to which South African job seekers have the 'luxury' to consider ethical reputation was investigated in the current study. With the country's heterogeneous population (*Rainbow nation*) in mind, the researcher sought to establish whether group differences in the consideration of ethical reputation, exist between job seekers. Specifically, group differences in gender, family income and academic discipline were investigated, as these demographic factors place job seekers in different cohorts, each with potentially unique preferences. In this chapter, a discussion of the psychometric properties of the scales is provided prior to relating research findings to extant literature. This will be followed by theoretical and practical implications, an overview of imitations and suggestions for future research.

The Psychometric Properties of the OCI

Given that the current study used the Organisational Choice Indicator (OCI), an instrument that had only been used once before by its developer Van der Merwe (2013), a review of its psychometric properties is provided here.

Structural differences of the OCI were observed between its use in Van der Merwe's (2013) research and its use in the current study. Following the conduction of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with the Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) extraction, Van der Merwe (2013) found a four-factor structure. These factors were labeled *Ethical reputation*, *Organisational characteristics*, *Opportunities and benefits* and *Transformation*. Each of these factors was comprised of all the items that were originally intended to measure these constructs, significantly loading onto them. For example, the OCI consisted of eight ethics related items that were designed to measure the extent to which the respondents would consider ethical reputations of organisations during job seeking endeavours. These items formed a single factor

that was subsequently labelled *Ethical reputation*. This however, was with the exception of four items, which were devoid of significant loading onto any factor – two of which had been aimed at measuring respondents' socio-economic status and its influence on organisational choice decisions (i.e. *I will work for any organisation that is willing to give me a job* and *I will work for any organisation, as long as the pay is good*). All the four factors showed excellent reliability, as the lowest Cronbach's alpha coefficient was as high as 0.8.

Contrary to Van der Merwe's (2013) neat and near perfect factor structure, the current researcher found different results from the EFA. While a four factor structure also resulted, these factors were not a replica of those found in Van der Merwe's (2013). Specifically, her EFA did not reveal the *Socio-economic benefits* factor that emerged in the current EFA – a factor whose loadings include the two aforementioned items that she found to not have significant loadings onto any factor.

In addition, the three factors that were similar between EFAs from the two studies had different numbers of items loading onto them. For example, the eight items that were intended to measure ethical reputation, did not all load significantly onto the *Ethical reputation* factor in the current study's EFA. Specifically, items 13 and six (*An organisation that is values-driven; An organisation that follows fair selection and promotion practices*) rather loaded with items related to *Organisational opportunities* in the present study, as opposed to *Ethical reputation* as in Van der Merwe's (2013) study. It is possible that some respondents could interpret these two items as more related to organisational benefits, than they are to ethics. The use of the words 'selection' and 'promotion' could easily be interpreted as opportunities, more than ethical reputation.

The observed differences in the factor structure of the OCI between the two studies could largely be attributed to how the EFA was conducted by the two researchers. Instead of running the EFA on all thirty-three items to identify the overall structure as was done in the current study, Van der Merwe (2013) conducted EFA on the 8 ethics related items separately from the remaining items of the OCI. In other words, she performed two EFAs; one for the ethics-related items and another for the rest of the items. It is therefore possible that the factor structure that she observed was not general to the whole measuring instrument – and that items were not given an adequate opportunity to group freely, owing to the separation between the ethics related from non-ethics related items. The lack of goodness of fit statistics in the preliminary study also makes it difficult to assess the extent to which her model was as fitting

as that of the current study. A discussion of the research findings that emerged from the current study is provided below.

Differences in Means between Male and Female Job Seekers' Consideration of Ethical Reputation when Choosing an Employer.

Contrary to the prediction that female job seekers would be more likely to consider ethical reputation (ER) when making organisational choices, an independent t-test revealed that this difference is not statistically significant. In other words, the null hypothesis of there being no difference between the two genders' consideration of ER when choosing employers, is true. The consideration of this factor (ER) cannot without chance, be differentiated by whether the job seeker is male or female. This finding is in contradiction to the gender-ethics association often made using social role theory (Eagly, 1987). The prediction that female job seekers would consider ER more than their male counterparts was founded on this theory's notion that the preferences and behaviours of men and women are in accordance with the stereo-types associated with the social roles they occupy (Eagly, 1987; Franke, Crown & Spake, 1997). Women been seen as more communal, emotionally expressive, concerned with others and thus, possessing a higher inclination to consider moral and ethical issues than men, are some of the stereotypes brought forth by proponents of the social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Franke et al., 1997; Roxas & Stoneback 2004).

In addition to arguing for differences in ethical consideration and behaviour between men and women, Eagly (1987) also observed that work experience often modifies and sometimes, overrides sex role stereotypes. In other words, the gender difference observed in pre-career samples declines as the work experience of samples increases. This observation is in line with the work of Ragins and Sundstrom (1990), who found gender differences in ethical perceptions to be greater at 'pre-career stages' due to socialisation forces and, considerably lower as an individual acquires more work experience, due to structural processes (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1990). It was on the basis of this very evidence that the current researcher predicted that indeed, given the student sample (pre-career individuals with little to no work experience), findings would accordingly reveal that indeed, female job seekers would consider ER more

than male job seekers. Possible explanations that could account for the contradictory finding of the current study are discussed below.

The first explanation lies in the change in gender norms and stereotypes since the early 1980's when social role theory was developed. In their 27-country analysis, Arpino, Esping-Andersen and Pessin (2015) found evidence of various changes in gender norms. Some of the changes they found include a significant reduction in engendered occupational segregations; higher degrees of gender-equitable attitudes; reduction in gender norm conformity and a general shift from traditional to a more gender-symmetric model in most of these countries (Arpino et al. 2015). These changes in gender stereotypes, where the line dividing behaviours and preferences of men from those of women is increasingly becoming blurred, could help explain why no differences were observed between male and female job seekers' consideration of ethical reputation when organisational choices are being made. The traditional stereotypical differences between the two genders have increasingly become more invisible.

The other explanation could be attributed to the modern day enlightenment about gender being on a spectrum instead of being binary – information that was likely not accounted for during the theoretical development of the social role framework. The existence of transgender (“people who change sex or inhabit third or multiple sex, androgynous, or fluid identities”) and intersex (people born with ‘ambiguous’ genitals : nether male or female or both) bodies explode the notion of male and female being discrete gender categories (Davis & Murph, 2013; Monro, 2005., pg.3; Grabham, 2007; Rahilly, 2015; Richards, Bouman, Seal, Barker, Nieder, & T’Sjoen, 2016). This could therefore explain why in 2019, the traditionally expected male/female binary division that was seen as responsible for distinct behaviours and preferences between men and women, does not hold -why no differences in ER consideration was evident between male and female job seekers in the current research.

Mean Differences in Consideration of Ethical Reputation by Job Seekers from Higher and Lower Family Income Levels

As expected, results from the independent t-test indicate that job seekers from family income levels higher than R30 000/month consider organisations' ethical reputation more than

those from family income levels below R30 000/month. This finding is in line with that of Van der Merwe (2013). She found that due to South Africa's socio-demographic circumstances (e.g. high unemployment and low standards of living), some job seekers would be willing to work for any organisation that offers them employment, with minimal consideration of that organisation's ethical reputation (Van de Merwe, 2013). Specifically, she discovered that despite their preference to work for a well ethically reputable employer, South African job seekers often "have" to accept any job they are offered because of the high unemployment rates (Van de Merwe, 2013). This desperation element in job seeking within South Africa is considerably higher for job seekers from lower family income levels – given their greater need for employment-related income. This could therefore explain why they consider the ethical reputations of organisations far less than their counterparts from families with higher income levels – a finding highly attributable to survival ethics (Fassin, 2010).

In an ongoing study exploring the cost of looking for work, researcher Lauren Graham and her team found that young South Africans spend on average, R938 a month (internet access, application fees, printing, transport, agent's fees etc), searching for employment (Qukula, 2019). Given these expenses, those who can better afford job searching are more likely to continue the search based on whether their preferred organisational choice indicators such as ethical reputation, are met. Those from lower family income levels may not have sufficient financial resources to keep searching for employment and are thus likely to settle for any organisation offering them a job, irrespective of its ethical reputation.

Differences in economic freedom between job seekers from lower and higher family income levels, may determine their pay preferences and thus, their organisational choices (Van den Berg & Uhlendorff, 2018). Cable and Judge (1994) indeed found evidence that job seekers with less economic freedom attach a lot more emphasis on pay grade as an indicator of employer choice, over any other factor. They regard pay as the most important job attribute, given their limited economic options. It is therefore possible that job seekers from lower income households would be less concerned about other organisational choice indicators such as ethical reputation – in comparison to those from higher family incomes.

Lower income job seekers could additionally be less inclined to consider these factors as they would remuneration, because the lower income brackets of their families may mean that they would depend more on their jobs for financial security, as they would less likely receive sufficient financial support from their low-income families. Therefore, while non-remuneration

related indicators such as ethical reputation may be considered, the value placed on them would be less for job seekers from low-income family backgrounds. This could explain the observed mean differences in the consideration of organisational ethical reputation in the current study.

Mean Differences in Organisational Ethical Reputation Consideration Between Groups of Job Seekers from the Engineering, Commerce and Humanities Academic Fields

One-way ANOVA was used to compare mean differences in the consideration of ER by job seekers from three academic disciplines. Planned contrasts indicated that prospective employees from Engineering academic fields consider ethical reputations of organisations significantly less than those from the Commerce and Humanities faculties. This finding was not as predicted, as the current researcher had expected that given their lower unemployment risk and easier job acquisition; job seekers with Engineering degrees would have more ‘luxury’ to consider ethical reputation when making organisational choices (Gebel & Pfeiffer, 2007; Reimer et al., 2008). In addition, results from the second contrast show that organisational ethical reputation is considered by job seekers from humanities faculties significantly more than those from the commerce faculty. In summation, humanities degree holders are more likely to consider organisational ethical reputation, followed by those from Commerce. Engineering graduates consider this indicator the least. A discussion outlining potential explanations to these findings is provided below.

Curriculum structure differences are evident between the humanities, commerce and engineering faculties – differences that affect whether and the extent to which graduates from these fields acquire knowledge about organisations’ ethics (De Wet, 2010). The Humanities discipline houses various courses in the quest to critically, analytically and speculatively understand the ‘human condition’- processes through which learners often acquire a philosophical understanding of moral and ethical reasoning, among other skills (Tuana, 2013).

With what appears to be a philosophy of pragmatism, the value system underlying the Commerce discipline considerably suggests that students are being prepared more for gainful employment than ethical grounding in society (Small, 2006). Indeed, the discipline’s focus on technical expertise without adequate attention to moral foundations, could explain the plethora

of unethical corporate governance scandals (Grant & Visconti, 2006). In many of these scandals (examples; rogue trading, false auditing and price fixing), evidence has often implicated chief financial officers¹, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs²), and senior auditors³ among others – all of whom most likely acquired their education in the Commerce field. In a similar vein, there are numerous corporate scandals involving professionals from the Engineering discipline, most of which involve unethical data use by technology giants such as Google⁴, Facebook⁵ and WhatsApp⁶ (Business Insider SA, 2018; Culver, Puri, Wokutch & Lohani, 2013; Kligyte, Marcy, Waples, Sevier, Godfrey, Mumford & Hougen, 2008).

In a 20-country survey of 100 business executives conducted by the London Business School (2004), it was revealed that the majority of global leaders attributed commercial crime and unethical business practices to a lack of moral foundations and suggested that management ethics be a focal point in the curriculum design of the Commerce and Engineering faculties. All this suggests that indeed, curriculum differences may be accountable to the varying extents to which professionals from the Humanities, Commerce and Engineering faculties embody morality, thus implying that prospective employees from these fields would reasonably consider organisational ethical reputation as a choice indicator, to different degrees.

Practical and theoretical implications of these findings, as well as recommendations – are outlined below.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Through the acknowledgement of this study's findings and limitations, suggestions for future research are provided in this section.

Suggestions based on limitations. The descriptive, cross-sectional nature of the current study limits any inferences of causality. To illustrate, the current researcher cannot make causal inferences about associations between job seekers' demographic differences and organisational choice decisions. This design also restricted an exploration of whether

¹ Tyco's Mark Swartz

² Steinhoff's Markus Jooste

³ Deloitte's Gavin Kruger

⁴ Android's Andy Rubin

⁵ Facebook's Cambridge Analytica

⁶ President Jair Bolsonaro

respondents' organisational choices would remain the same over time (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Even though the study's aim was not to infer causality or assess stability over time, it could be useful for future researchers to employ experimental and longitudinal designs; as these might provide some insight about any potential time-lag effects.

Another avenue for empirical research is in the use of non-probability sampling. Having conveniently sampled students registered at a tertiary institution in South Africa may have presented selection bias as participants were not randomly selected (Dempster & Hanna, 2016). While university students may have been found to constitute a large proportion of job seekers (Statistics South Africa, 2018), the obtained sample was more representative of only educated South African job seekers. As a result, it was unrepresentative of the general job seeking population in South Africa. Nonetheless, the relevance of the study to organisations may still persist, given that for best talent; organisations often look to individuals who have higher education qualifications.

The generalisability of research findings is further limited by the selection of participants from only one South African university. Given the limited time and resources capacity, the current researcher had to select a single tertiary institution where she had direct access to participants and all the bodies governing the use of students for research at a university. It could be worthwhile to replicate this study using randomly sampled participants from different universities as well as from non-university settings such as job seekers without tertiary education or those who have already joined the workforce. This would give a clearer picture about organisational choice indicators for the general South African job seeking population.

Suggestions based on findings. Given the differences in the dimensionality of the Organisational Choice Indicator between Van der Merwe (2013) and the current researcher, construct validity of the OCI needs to be further explored. It is therefore suggested that future researchers employ Confirmatory Factor Analysis to further assess whether the four-factor models obtained in these two exploits are good fits and establish construct validity.

Given the observed influences of job seekers' demographic differences on their consideration of ethical reputation as a choice indicator, it could be very insightful if future researchers could include more demographic variables for a more comprehensive outlook at group differences' influences on South African job seeking endeavors.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, the present study augments extant talent attraction literature. Among the factors/indicators that have been associated with job seekers' attraction to organisations, many Western researchers have increasingly attached reverence to organisational ethical reputation (Balmer, 2013; Davies, Chun, da Silva & Roper, 2004; Chun, 2006; Olins, 2014; Palazzo & Basu, 2007; van de Ven, 2008). With the exception of studies by Donaldson (2011) and Van der Merwe (2013), the applicability of this Western literature within the unique context of the South African labour market, has not been sufficiently explored. The current study thus supplements these two exploits and in addition, offers unique insights in that it examined the influence of job seekers' demographic characteristics on whether and the extent to which they consider ethical reputation when choosing employers. Given the highly heterogeneous population make up of south Africa, findings about the contribution of group differences in prospective employees' consideration of ethical reputation offer a much-needed addition to talent acquisition research in the country. Illustratively, findings on gender differences shed light on gender influences on organisational choice, which is particularly relevant given the constantly increasing number of South African women entering the workplace as a result of legislation such as affirmative action (Chen et al., 2016)

Another noteworthy theoretical implication of this study involves the construct validity of the Organisational Choice Indicator, the measurement instrument employed. The resulting four-factor model of *Ethical reputation*, *Socio-economic benefits*, *Organisational features* and *Organisational opportunities*, was revealed to substantively model organisational choice in South Africa. This implies that job seekers in the country make clear distinctions between organisational choice indicators and thus attach varying levels of importance to each one, during job search endeavors. This is in support of earlier notions about job seekers using different attraction indicators to choose workplaces (examples: Agarwal et al, 2017; Clardy, 2005; Walsh et al., 2009; Williamson et al., 2010; Zemke et al., 2000).

Practical Implications

Findings from this study may inform South African organisations of the potential usefulness that the ethical nature of their reputations could have in the attraction of ethically discerning employees. The finding that job seekers with different academic backgrounds attach varying levels of importance to organisational ethical reputation may suggest that exposure to

ethical foundations varies between these fields. In particular, the low consideration of ethical reputation by job seekers from the Commerce and Engineering disciplines signals that students therein need more moral foundations in their curriculum, lest the current scourge of corporate ethical misconduct persist. There have been some positive moves in the right direction in the United States, where more and more universities (such as Leo J. Meehan School of Business, University of Pretoria, The Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Witwatersrand) are incorporating ethics and moral reasoning into their commerce curricula (BusinessTech SA, 2017; Malam & Bester, 2014; Rippon, Royan & Asmal, 2015; Salvucci, 2019). This shift from simply providing students with technical expertise to involving an education on moral reasoning and citizenship is what could go a long way in uprooting the pervasive ethical misconducts of corporations upward – as future business leaders and/or employees would be more ethically discerning.

For organisations, attracting ethically discerning employees is paramount to business success because as history has shown with companies such as Enron, corporations with stronger ethical cultures thrive better (Hill, 2016). To illustrate, talent attraction is easier because job seekers are more inclined to work for a well reputed organisation, and ethical scandals that often lead to bankruptcy are avoided as the employees would have adequate prior ethical awareness and would be more likely to engage in morally founded business practices (Hill, 2016). This signals competitive advantage (Jain & Bhatt, 2015; Samuel & Chipunza, 2013) and organisations could leverage their ethical reputation and use it to tailor its recruitment strategies.

For prospective employees, it is as crucial to take time to consider ethical reputations of organisations when choosing employers – despite the unfortunate reality of high unemployment. This is because allowing the desperation for employment to lead to the acceptance of any job offered (and reasonably so), the job security will only likely be short lived. This is because if and/or when that organisation is caught in an ethics scandal, job insecurity will resurface, as many jobs may be lost.

Conclusion

Given the increasing need for organisations to have talented employees at the core of their competitive advantage, understanding the factors most important to job seekers is central to talent attraction strategies. The current researcher sought to investigate whether the South African job seeking population like in the Western countries, also considers ethical reputation as an indicator of organisational choice, given the high unemployment rates. Subsequently group differences in the consideration of this indicator were compared and it was found that job seekers' academic fields and the income levels of their family indeed contribute to the extent to which they consider the ethical reputations of organisations when choosing jobs. Despite a number of limitations, insights from this study may provide an understanding of how South African organisations can use ethical reputation to attract ethically discerning employees and thus gain a global competitive advantage – especially given the persistent unethical corporate practices across the globe.

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Appendix A Ethics approval letter



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31 July 2019

Ms Mokabai Phaaro
School of Management
Studies
University of Cape Town

Dear Mokabai Phaaro

REF: REC 2019/000/085

Organisational ethical reputation as an organisational choice indicator

We are pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved. Unless otherwise specified this ethical clearance is valid for 1 year and may be renewed upon application.

Please be aware that you need to notify the Ethics Committee immediately should any aspect of your study regarding the engagement with participants as approved in this application, change. This may include aspects such as changes to the research design, questionnaires, or choice of participants.

The ongoing ethical conduct throughout the duration of the study remains the responsibility of the principal investigator.

We wish you well for your research.

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